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UNCLAS RANGOON 001629

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, CA TASK FORCE, OPS CENTER
BANGKOK, KATHMANDU FOR USAID
USPACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: INDONESIA QUAKE HITS BURMA

REF: 12/27 EMBASSY-CA TASK FORCE EMAIL

1. Rangoon awoke on Sunday the 26th to a 5.3 earthquake, the largest since 1958 in the capital, testimony to the vast power of the quake off Indonesia. Though there were no reports of casualties or major damage in Rangoon, there were scattered reports throughout the area of slightly damaged buildings. The state-run media was predictably tight-lipped about the quake, as the SPDC leadership views any natural disaster as a bad omen for its continued rule. However, without context, the December 27th papers carried reminders of what to do during an earthquake.

2. According to eyewitness reports and the GOB's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Burma's most heavily touristed beach areas -- west of Rangoon on the Bay of Bengal -- were not hit by particularly large waves, though the undertow was significant. There were no reports of any damage, injuries, or deaths in these areas. However, coastal areas of southeastern Burma -- near the Thai border -- had high waves. A foreign press report claimed that six or seven locals were killed in that area, however, Rangoon businessmen with interests there said they'd heard of damage to buildings and bridges but not of any casualties. A Ministry of Hotels and Tourism official told us that there were eight or nine pleasure craft, carrying foreigners, including Americans, in this area but that he had not heard of any problems. The boats are expected back to port between the 27th and January 2nd.

3. UNOCAL's Rangoon office reported no damage to the offshore Yadana natural gas platform, located in far southeastern Burma, nor to the onshore pipeline facility. Both are operated by France's Total, but UNOCAL is a member of the operating consortium. As a precaution the platform stopped pumping gas for 3.5 hours beginning at 7:40 am on the 26th, but was back to normal production by noon.
MARTINEZ